



Josh Flores: Welcome to the official CEL Talks podcast, brought to you by the Conference on English Leadership or CEL. CEL is a collaborative, dynamic, discussion-based forum for literacy leaders organized under the National Council of Teachers of English, also known as NCTE. Every year, and in every episode we honor conversations around texts, speakers, and big ideas. We believe it's essential for leaders to maintain and move conversations. Welcome to the conversation.

Josh Flores: Thank you for subscribing and sharing our CEL Talks podcast. I am Josh Flores, your host for season one. Each episode was recorded live at the 2018 CEL Annual Conference in Houston, Texas, and features speakers, keynotes, and members of CEL, the Conference on English Leadership. We hope our conversations ignites and supports conversations with your colleagues at your schools or wherever you may be listening to this. It's a great PLC tool. If you want to introduce something different to your PLCs. I think it's a great support tool for that, to start conversations that maybe you are already having or want to have. And we hope that you find all sorts of unique ways to use these podcast episodes. It's chock full of information. I had a lot of fun just talking shop about our profession with professionals this year, and I look forward to continuing this podcast series.

Josh Flores: Speaking of sharing and continuing conversations, if you would like to know more about CEL, you can find us on the Twitter at @ncte_cel. Or, you can search for the hashtag #CELchat, and you'll find our members using that hashtag and sharing and having conversations. You can also visit ncte.org, the NCTE main page, and find us under the groups tab. Here's where you can get all the information and get prepared for our 2019 Fall Conference. It's happening in November, 24th through the 26th in Baltimore, Maryland. And get this, our theme this year, Creating Opportunity: Leadership to Ignite Movements and Momentum. I'm excited. So, hope you enjoy that. And I hope you enjoy this inaugural podcast episode.

Josh Flores: Please don't forget to subscribe and share with a teacher friend that you love and give us some feedback. Keep the conversation going with us too. Engage with us on the Twitter. So, thanks again and enjoy this episode of CEL Talks.

CEL Talks podcast, Season 1, Episode 4

Blowing Things Up with Matt Marone

Matt Marone: Yeah, no, like anti-riot gear. So, I guess that is riot gear. It's like *flammable* and *inflammable*.

Josh Flores: I mean, is it the same thing?

Matt Marone: Yeah.



Josh Flores: I guess the riot gear is you go into start a riot?

Matt Marone: No, riot gear is. . .

Josh Flores: And the anti-riot gear is you go into stop a riot?

Matt Marone: No, riot gear would be stuff to stop a riot. Like, the cops would wear riot gear.

Josh Flores: So anti-riot gear, you would wear that if you're going to go start a riot?

Matt Marone: Yeah, that would be like preemptive riot gear.

Josh Flores: So this is getting nerdy real fast.

Matt Marone: Yeah, yeah.

Josh Flores: But you know, English teacher stuff.

Matt Marone: Absolutely.

Josh Flores: So, well thanks for agreeing to this, because I know you've got places to be and you're super popular.

Matt Marone: Is this thing on now?

Josh Flores: Yeah. Yeah.

Matt Marone: Okay.

Josh Flores: Yeah, I just hit record and go.

Matt Marone: All right, so this is happening.

Josh Flores: Welcome to the first ever CEL, official, CEL podcasts. You know, we've been experimenting.

Matt Marone: This is the first one.

Josh Flores: I mean, this is kind of the first real one, right?

Matt Marone: And I'm the best you could do.

Josh Flores: I mean. . .



Matt Marone: Because usually when you kick off a podcast. . .

Josh Flores: I wanted to start strong.

Matt Marone: I mean, Michelle Obama has a book out. You didn't want to get—you're going to go with me?

Josh Flores: I mean, you know, she was like, "Please?" I was like, "Nah, nah."

Matt Marone: Yeah.

Josh Flores: You know, got to get Matt while he's here.

Matt Marone: Yeah.

Josh Flores: All right. Just don't present.

Matt Marone: I question your judgment, but I appreciate the opportunity.

Josh Flores: I'm a big fan. . .

Matt Marone: Yeah. Right.

Josh Flores: . . . of Michelle.

Matt Marone: Yes, there we go.

Josh Flores: And you.

Matt Marone: Waiting for the second half of that sentence.

Josh Flores: Just saying.

Matt Marone: Yeah, no, but happy to be here.

Josh Flores: And my mind's on fire after the keynote. That was great.

Matt Marone: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Like I had so many thoughts. Did you take notes like crazy? How do you take notes at conferences? Do you do the digital thing or do the notebook?

Matt Marone: I wait for someone else to take really good notes.



Josh Flores: So you just sit and listen?

Matt Marone: I try. No, I try to. . . you know what it is? I look, selfishly, I look for things that I could steal and then use in my classroom. I think that's, I think that when you're at a conference like this, you're always in the back of your mind thinking, or in front of your mind, thinking, how am I going to use this? You know, tomorrow?

Josh Flores: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Matt Marone: And I think there's a lot there that challenges assumptions. I think there's a reason that the three of them were in that slot.

Josh Flores: Yeah.

Matt Marone: Right. Because there were common elements to all of our practice in what they were teaching, in what they were talking about. So, I mean, I know that those sorts of presentations are challenging in the sense that there's a lot I now know that I didn't know before and I can't un-know it. You know? It'd be far more convenient to un-know it, because then I can go back to teaching my ignorantly flawed practice and that would be fantastic because I could just dwell in my own lack of awareness. But now that I know it, you know, I have two options, right? I can adapt to that, and I could do the hard thing and become a better teacher as a result hopefully. Or I could, you know, be blissfully ignorant of it and in doing so, be a hypocrite. So that's the gauntlet that was thrown down there. So, hopefully I go with the former.

Josh Flores: You actually remind me of something I'm really bad at doing, is I didn't introduce you whatsoever. We just started talking. Do you mind introducing yourself and telling like what do you do? What's your background? How long you've been in the business?

Matt Marone: Sure. I'm Matt Marone. I teach high school English. I've been doing that for 12 years in Hillsdale, New Jersey, Pascack Valley High School. And, I also am a literacy coach, and I work with other neighboring districts on curriculum development and best practices in the classroom, the middle school and high school level usually. And I also teach an alternate route program in New Jersey for people looking to get into teaching. Basically make sure that they're accredited by the state and provide them with some tools and resources and strategies to help with those first few years in the classroom, which can be as—I don't need to tell you—it can be pretty daunting. So that's what I'm doing presently.

Josh Flores: That's amazing. So, is it a program someone else developed? Or did you help develop the program to get these first-year teachers in?



- Matt Marone: No, I certainly can't take credit for developing the program. But it's, they had a need and I had an availability and it was something that I believe in. I think that the later you get into teaching, the less support is immediately available. I think that it's tough enough to switch careers, and of all things, move into teaching. Right? I think that very often they kind of fall through the cracks. You know, you don't always get assigned mentors. You, when you were, you're not looked at as a 22-year-old coming out of a, you know, a college undergrad program. You're looked at maybe from the outside as, "Oh, they must've been teaching for a while."
- Matt Marone: So there's this kind of implicit, "Oh, they know what they're doing." And it's not the case, you know. Starting teaching is just controlled chaos. It's. . . in some cases just chaos. And, I think it's important that those teachers have as fair of a shake as anyone else.
- Josh Flores: So what's the most challenging aspect of teaching to explain to incoming teachers or to teach them?
- Matt Marone: The legitimate concern of a lack of familiarity with their individual needs. Because teachers are coming from all different types of districts with different needs, and so, when I'm talking to let's say a first-year music teacher about their experience and giving them strategies, and then they turn around and tell me that their district can't afford to replace the instruments that are all broken, there is clearly an awareness gap there. And that's something that I have to adjust to. And I have to be a little bit more humble to be honest with you and check a lot of the assumptions that I have about their individual experience. So it really forces me to see the student, but in this case the teacher as well, as their own person in their own ecosystem. Rather than just kind of, "Oh yeah, here's what first- or second-year of teachers experience" as a boilerplate kind of assumption. So, yeah.
- Josh Flores: Wow. So you don't even have like the curriculum set up. Like you get to know their individual challenges first and then you use that to kind of guide your instruction with those first-year teachers.
- Matt Marone: They are the curriculum. In the way this program works, they are bringing their real-life situations and I'm bringing mine and kind of, I'm sharing how I would address them. They're questioning, they're pushing back, they're adapting and relating it to their experience, and then vice versa. They'll share their struggles and I'll try to find ways to help them. So.
- Josh Flores: But you're especially good at that because I know that's a big part of your presentation style is that you embrace the randomness, right? Very specifically like, random.



- Matt Marone: Yes. You've hit the nail on the head. My particular style is I don't develop a set plan.
- Josh Flores: You say that though, but one of the reasons I've, the actual topic I wanted to discuss with you that we haven't gotten was design.
- Matt Marone: Sure.
- Josh Flores: Like, you are structured, you do have like this, I think you have a unique perspective on design. Not only because I feel like we fell in love at first Keynotes, because you're one of the few people I know that actually knows what Keynote is and uses it on a Mac, like, effectively.
- Matt Marone: We geek out about that quite frequently.
- Josh Flores: Right? Design and font and color and style and animations. But I mean, I've noticed you have like a structure, a setup to your presentations. You have a pace that you follow. And I've even been privy to like overhearing you adjust it in the back. Like yesterday, things were running long.
- Matt Marone: Yeah.
- Josh Flores: And you came up and you made adjustments on the fly with your team that you're presenting with.
- Matt Marone: Sure. Yeah. Well listen, I will always appreciate people putting positive spins on what I view as a possible lack of preparation. And, and yeah, no, I mean I was, I think I was speaking too much, which led to a little bit of an unbalance yesterday. And I don't typically play well with others, and that's definitely a big teacher flaw of mine is that usually I like doing sessions by myself. And I'd say it's partially because of the ego, but it's also, I think because then I know that I can kind of mitigate any concerns, and also, then I don't have to feel guilty for compromising someone else's presentation. But, I couldn't have asked for two better copresenters than Brett Conrad and Nick Emmanuele.
- Matt Marone: And yeah, no, I, the way I like to look at it is I'm designing the space, right? I'm designing this framework for the delivery of the content, right? And there's certain kind of benchmark criteria that I want to hold, whether it's a lesson I'm teaching or the design of classroom like you are alluding to or even a conference session. There are certain beats I want to hit over the course of that. And then how I get there, sometimes there's a little bit of free jazz, you know? And I find that the more scripted, whether it's a student presentation or a keynote at a conference like this, the less authentic it feels and the less, I think, you can innately trust the presenter that what they're saying is from the heart and not from the textbook, you know? So, I always prefer the spontaneity and the



tightrope walking of figuring a lot out as you go. Like getting from point A to point B, you might have to take a few detours, and I like that part.

Josh Flores: Seems like your mind works a flowchart like, "Okay. I went here, and now I have these options so I could expand here and go here."

Matt Marone: Yeah.

Josh Flores: But you said these "beats." So, what are the common beats that you have every time you set up a presentation or you set up a lesson for your students?

Matt Marone: I mean, I think the big one is I got to know where they have to be at the end.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Matt Marone: And I think that working backwards, whether it's lesson-plan design or whether it's. . . Anytime you're trying to get heavy ideas out in an accessible way.

Josh Flores: Yeah.

Matt Marone: I think you need to, and I think writ large this is a problem culturally, is that we have this almost extremist desire to have someone immediately on our side in, you know, any given issue or societal problem. And we forget that before they can get from A to Z, they got to go from A to B and then B to C. And, so we have to incrementally check for that connection and understanding. This is with our students all the time. We talk about formative assessment, right? And, like, we have to make sure that they're with us so they can keep going. We wouldn't just assume that by the end of the period they're going to just be there.

Matt Marone: With a keynote or with a conference session, it's the same thing. If you're not seeing that empathetic nodding in the room, you better follow up and find out why and adjust your presentation accordingly. If you see everybody's taking out their laptops, not to tweet out something that's going on in the session, but because they're bored, you have. . . they made a choice to be there. That's a commitment of their time equity. They could've gone to a lot of sessions and you don't want them thinking about all the other sessions they could've gone to. So you have an obligation. There is a shared trust in a conference session like that. So I try to give that back and adjust accordingly. And I do call a few audibles on the line, you know, during a session. But I think it's always with the audience in mind or whether that's a student or a teacher, you know.

Josh Flores: When you say you "call a few audibles" you mean, like, those check-ins? Because I noticed you do that really well. Like I will, you will say something or get it started on something and I'll be lost in thought on that. But. . . you do that teacher-voice thing really well, where you don't yell. You don't even have to



make wild gestures. I do as a teacher, but like, I don't know, for some reason your tone is that you say it in a way where I have to lean in and really focus on what your words are. And it always, like, brings me back. Like you do these brain check-ins and then checkouts. Like I check out to do whatever you assigned us, but then you're able to bring the audience back in too with something funny, like a beat.

Matt Marone: I appreciate it. They say if you can reach one person, you know, that's so I check that box.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Matt Marone: No, I mean it's what I tell my kids and it's what I tell people, like, when it's their first time presenting t a conference and they're, you know, they're just, the beads of sweat are flying. . . "It's just you just having a conversation," right? That's all it is. Admittedly a one-sided conversation. But we're all choosing to be here with just, we're all people, we're all in it for the right reason, the same reasons and the right reasons, one would hope. And it's just an opportunity to share what's working for you and to hopefully learn from them. And if you approach it as anything more than that, you're creating a very intimidating power dynamic.

Josh Flores: Okay.

Matt Marone: So, yeah, I mean the same thing as us talking right now. Like if I was just talking to Josh Flores, as in the Twitter Guru Josh Flores, you know? Yeah. And it would be like, yeah. And by the way, how do you stay so hip? I got to ask, because like all of your cultural allusions and references and slang, like you're not using it to induce cringes like I do with my students. You're, I feel like you actually understand it. So, I need to pick your brain about that.

Josh Flores: I still don't truly understand what it means to be "on fleek." I think it's pretty good. But I incorrectly used, I wonder how much of this needs to be edited out. Like, I incorrectly used the term "Netflix-and-chill," which has a very inappropriate connotation. . . but I used it with a Sunday school class that I was teaching, and they corrected me 'cause they were horrified.

Matt Marone: Yeah.

Josh Flores: I don't know if you know the context of that, but I'll let you look it up on Urban Dictionary.

Matt Marone: That'll be fun later. I have some homework. I convinced my students, and this is another thing too, while we're going down this side road that will be edited out. . .



- Josh Flores: Sure.
- Matt Marone: Famous last words. Some of my students were freaking out because our department chair put up a bulletin board at the beginning of the year that said, it was like Drake lyrics repurposed as like a solicitation to read.
- Josh Flores: Fantastic.
- Matt Marone: Yeah. And the kids were all cringing because that's what you do when adults try to be relevant: You cringe.
- Josh Flores: Yeah.
- Matt Marone: And what the kids don't understand, and I had to explain to them, is that we don't do it and then accidentally have them cringe. We do it so they cringe. And that's one of the joys of being an adult. And, I imagine one of the joys of being a parent is that you are intentionally trying to solicit that. It feeds the soul when you see that kind of like everything just tightens. Yeah. So I convinced my students, long story short that I thought that AF meant "and fun." So. . .
- Josh Flores: Yeah. So why not?
- Matt Marone: "You know, this class, man. Today's class is going to be lit AF."
- Josh Flores: Yes.
- Matt Marone: "It's going to be lit. I'm going to keep the lights all the way on, and fun." And just watching just, it's like a mix of pity and shame. . .
- Josh Flores: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Matt Marone: . . .that I try to foment in my classroom. I find that that's most conducive to learning. So.
- Josh Flores: I think so.
- Matt Marone: Yeah.
- Josh Flores: I mean, but you know, kids are getting savvy. I think eventually they're gonna call us out on like some form of cultural appropriation to like their youth.
- Matt Marone: Oh, just age appropriation.
- Josh Flores: Yeah. Age appropriation. There it is.



- Matt Marone: Absolutely.
- Josh Flores: “You're taking our slang. You're ruining it. And we have to go create new slang words and then you're going to ruin those.”
- Matt Marone: Well you have to keep in mind though, this is all said through the vessel of me wearing like page 47 of the J. Crew catalog. So, they don't really need to worry too much about having their style copped.
- Josh Flores: But you're hip. I mean for those in the Twitter world though, like if you need some like connections, if you don't know Matt, you're like the white Mr. Minor [Cornelius Minor].
- Matt Marone: Thank you.
- Josh Flores: Right? Like, he presented at CEL, and he was amazing. He's very engaging too.
- Matt Marone: Sure.
- Josh Flores: Like, I don't know. Do you skateboard like he does? That's how I connected to Mr. Minor, we're both skateboarders.
- Matt Marone: No, I've skateboarded once.
- Josh Flores: Okay, well.
- Matt Marone: Well that should tell you everything you need to know. One time. Snowboarded once too. So.
- Josh Flores: I just snowboarded once. Not for me. No, not into that.
- Matt Marone: No. I mean Twitter is taking some weird twists and turns lately. I've been actually on Twitter a lot less lately. I think it's becoming kind of toxic.
- Josh Flores: It has. It has.
- Matt Marone: Teaching-wise it's okay. It can get a little didactic but it's okay. But I worry about the effect in a broader sense. And, I've been. . . Weren't we going to talk about design? I don't know if we're talking about design anymore.
- Josh Flores: I'm going to come back to that, because I do have like one other thought on that. But I mean.
- Matt Marone: Yeah. But my concern with Twitter right now is that I'm seeing more and more that my students are unwilling to voice their own working through of an issue in



society because they're so afraid of being vilified or called out for being wrong. And I think that we need to remember that our classrooms are places to hash out our thoughts. We talk about safe spaces a lot, which are fundamentally important, but we also need safe spaces to work through our thoughts. And to me right now, Twitter and you know by proxy of its kind of call-out nature right now, I worry that people aren't able to explore ideas. And as a result are just not engaging with certain really challenging ideas. So yeah, so I've soured a little bit on Twitter.

Josh Flores: But again I think that's because adults, adults got on Twitter and they ruined it. You know, they started using it for adult purposes, and now it's not a place where you can just share photos and maybe like . . . here's what I'm thinking, here's an opinion. But you could be attacked . . . wanting to get . . . people . . . requires your evidence and citations on it. It's like, man, they sure took that over. So now I got to go to this, what is it? Snapchat. So then my stuff can be deleted immediately.

Matt Marone: Yeah. Well I still think this is where we reveal that you're far less paranoid than I am about some things. And to me just the whole nature of having something that you can only say in X amount of characters is really, you know, inherently encouraging very blunt broad-stroke binary assumptions about things . . . things meant to get liked and retweeted rather than contemplated. So I am concerned about the fact that what happens when we turned into a country of opinions that could all fit on bumper stickers, you know?

Josh Flores: Right, right. You don't know. Well, I mean this goes back to your design. This is what I was coming back around to.

Matt Marone: Sure.

Josh Flores: Our topic of design.

Matt Marone: Hey, if you can tie this back together, you're better than I thought, Josh Flores.

Josh Flores: I'm telling you like, you know, you have this, you stated, like, you start with the end in mind. So you have this goal you want to reach with, whether you're presenting to adults, incoming teachers, or your students.

Matt Marone: Sure.

Josh Flores: You're like standards-based or whatever. You probably use the standards? But you start by having a conversation and getting to know your audience. And you build that relationship, that professional relationship—teacher-student relationship, expert-audience relationship—and then make the connections along the way. Like that's how, after this conversation, I'm seeing your design



work. So, you start with the standard, or you start with the standards in mind, but you get them there by building that relationship.

Matt Marone: Yeah. We're not algorithms, we're not websites, we're not worksheets. There are some, there's a reason why there needs to be a human element in teaching, and it's very hard to learn from someone if you don't like them and you don't respect them. And having spent many years as an unliked, unrespected teacher, I think you, ultimately it dawns on you that you're not just transferring metadata, you know? You are engaging in a very, very vulnerable action, which is accepting that you're going to leave this room a different person than you were when you came in. And that's what you do every time you walk into a classroom and every time you walk into a session. You're saying, "I'm open to the possibility of being different in some way." And that is a very fragile experience. And being unwilling to respect and acknowledge that fragility is insensitive, but it's also disrespectful.

Matt Marone: And so I think going in, I think that going into any sort of conversation, whether it's in the framework of a classroom lesson or a conference session, every single one of those conversations is an exercise in vulnerability. If I'm not willing to be completely honest with the people in my room, what right do I have to demand their attention, their consideration, a rethinking of their frameworks in their life? So, to me that's paramount is you go into this, it's a very delicate dance, and you owe a degree of respect and honesty, you know, with your fellow participants.

Josh Flores: Yeah. I would imagine your students feel very respected by you.

Matt Marone: I hope so.

Josh Flores: Right. Because, you do have these conversations, and I think that's one of the . . . every time in my, especially in my new position, I go into various schools. And they always pull out all the pie charts, all the data first. And then I go do the observations in the classroom and then it's like, "Oh this is what's really wrong. There's no relationships being built here. Like the students don't know their teacher, the teacher doesn't really know the students." And so it starts with like very simple things. Like, do you say hi? Do you show any curiosity in your students? But it's really hard to explain that using, you know, breaking away from the data. Like, we're all so consumed about looking at that first.

Matt Marone: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Before just having a conversation with a student in the hallway.



Matt Marone: And we have this very narrow interpretation of what “data” means, right? What we mean by that, we mean this kind of objective numbers-based data. So it only can focus then, by definition, on things that are quantifiable.

Josh Flores: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Matt Marone: Right? So if we can only focus on things that are quantifiable, all the things that make that great teacher you had *great*, are essentially falling by the wayside. So, why is it that we can't wrap ourselves in a, as "educational reformers"—by the way, I'm doing air quotes, I know this is a podcast—but as educational reformers go into a situation, why can't they wrap themselves up in anecdotal data, right? Like why can't we go . . . Why can't we look at what a school is doing poorly or doing successfully through the lens of the dynamic between students and teachers? Or students and each other, or colleagues? We don't because it's very, very hard to sell software that way. You know.

Josh Flores: And it's a lot more time consuming too.

Matt Marone: You want the hot-take, there's the #Marone hot-take. I think it's very, very hard if you have a booth at a very large convention hall to say, “This is going to get your teachers and students to respect each other more.” I think that is not as, it doesn't connect with our reptilian brain as much as you know, “47% of students within the first three months saw an increase in their vocabulary development.” You know? And, if you are under the expectations of your superior, you know, whatever role you're in in education, you have this tacit or otherwise expectation that you're “bringing the numbers up.” You know? What's that doing? Is that . . . All that's doing is if we're focusing on numbers, we might as well just say the kids are numbers too, you know. So there it is. Go ahead. Don't @ me. You know?

[laughter]

Josh Flores: So hip. See?

Matt Marone: I, you know what it is. I think I saw that on someone . . . I think I saw that on your Twitter probably.

Josh Flores: I mean those are a lot of good ideas. What is something you would do differently if you could start a new school from the ground up?

Matt Marone: Oh, Josh. I don't fix things, I just blow them up. That's my. . . I'm just a catastrophist I just . . . Chicken Little of the education world. What would I do different? Okay . . . well so, and a lot of this, I've stolen over the years and then kind of reinterpreted. But, I think we have to just like, I would work backwards from a lesson or a session. I think we need to work back, yeah, work backwards



from what is our goal in these four or eight or however many years with our students in terms of who they become, right? And so often it's like we're preparing them for the next level. But that is a solely academic discussion, right? That is solely based on are they going to be able to hang at that high school or college or post-college level?

Matt Marone: I tell my kids sometimes . . . I'm a public school teacher and I tell them sometimes that you know, lest we forget, I am a representative of the US government. You know? I'm a public school teacher.

Josh Flores: Right.

Matt Marone: I'm an extension of the US government

Josh Flores: Right, you work for the government.

Matt Marone: And historically, whether we like it or not, this system was put in place not to make you great, but to make you employable. We want to keep the wheels of the economy turning. So the phrase, they don't know I'm a spy, you know, they don't know that I'm a double agent. But I think that it needs to be said that this whole system originated from a desire to herd and move as one piece, basically, people who happen to be born within 12 months of each other and get them into a world where they can keep buying coffee and t-shirts. And how are we going to put them in a position where they can make just enough money to buy those things?

Matt Marone: Right? So when we can look at some of our interactions and some of our roles as teacher and student as through this framework of, why are we even here in the first place, right? Start questioning some of the fundamental elements of education, public education, the dynamic, the power dynamic between teacher and student. Why is it that we, just like when we get out of school, we're chasing the shiny objects, in school, we're chasing the reassuring and maybe even validating grades? Why is it that any of our "high-performing" students will feel less about themselves because someone wrote a different letter on a page. These are the systemic flaws and inequities that we're seeing every day. No matter where you are, what district you are, what your, what the demographics of your students are. We're seeing our students just beholden to something that is fundamentally arbitrary, right?

Matt Marone: There is no objective reason you can't have a school prioritize kindness over academic performance. We don't have any schools that do it, and I'm stealing from Ken Robinson here, but we don't have any schools that do this. But there's no objective reason they can't. It's just that we're beholden to generation upon generation of "This is what school is." So yeah, when we talk about disruption, disruption doesn't mean giving our students choice of two books instead of one.



Disruption means rethinking the very paradigm of what school is, right? Like, who are we in the classroom? What is it we're trying to get across to our students? And, what are the conduits through which we get that information out there? What does it look like, Josh? I don't know. And I know the irony of that because we're supposed to be talking about design. But I know that what we're doing for so many of our students isn't working. Yeah. And it's burning teachers out, and it's pissing kids off.

Josh Flores: I don't know where to go from that. That was great.

Matt Marone: Like I said, I'm just blowing things up. I'm not building them back.

Josh Flores: Well, you know, my favorite question is always to ask: What's an aspect that needs to be disrupted in education? I think you put it in there. Like I feel like you would design a school where kindness is the focus. And you'd accomplish a lot and you would pump out a lot of not mediocre, not average human beings.

Matt Marone: I think we forget sometimes that our kids cannot leave. You know? It's a very simple thing. No, but it's odd. Like I get to be there, but they pay me. Right? They cannot leave and they are obligated legally to be there. And, if we took any adults and we legally obligated them to be somewhere that was painful every single day, they would be a prisoner. Right? And right now, and I just heard this the other day, one of the key differences between our kids, basically anyone, you know, who is a minor right now in America, and our prison system, one of the big differences is the prisoners are required to go outside for 75 minutes a day.

Josh Flores: That really hurts.

Matt Marone: Our kids spend less time outside than our prisoners are legally required to because otherwise it will be cruel and unusual. And we *know* all of these facts, they are all out there. The fact that our kids, they are beholden to a system that that is prioritizing their products instead of their processes, right? That is diligent in its efforts to reinforce this concept that if you are not getting the right grade, you are fundamentally flawed as a learner/person. Why can we not build a system that actually validates and encourages failure rather than just putting it on a poster on the wall? Right. And I just picture like there's a little squirrel hanging onto a branch or a cat and it just says, "Hang in there."

Matt Marone: You know, like why is it that we're so, we are so hypocritical with our messaging? And systemically we're so adamant that everyone does well on the first time. You know, and I know that something we've talked about before. Just like failure cannot just be a trendy slogan. Like if we want our kids to fail and to celebrate the process and to learn from their failure, we cannot create a system or support a system that . . . where our students are scared to death of doing



something wrong. That's the thing I would change if we're talking about something changing. And you know, I think that the way we talk about honor roll, the way we give out bumper stickers to the parents of the kids getting A's, the way that we have a student who possibly took fewer chances than other students in order to get the highest grade and be able to speak during graduation. I think we need to rethink the frameworks in schools that celebrate the kids who might take the fewest chances.

Josh Flores: So I feel that also comes back to, you know, you spoke about vulnerability and so that made me think about vulnerability and transparency are a good way to start to actively demonstrate and model these qualities and character to students by being vulnerable, by admitting, "Okay, this lesson is failing. I need to rethink everything we're doing here."

Matt Marone: Yeah.

Josh Flores: Okay, forget the quiet time doing the worksheet. We're going to do the worksheet in pairs and then we're going to come to a consensus on the answers together, or something like that. And being totally transparent with the kids. That's what, big reason why I do think as hard as it is, and I have also kind of taken, have not been on social media as active as I usually am, but I do think it is a professional responsibility for us to be on Facebook, on Twitter, somewhere in the public eye where our students can see us actively pursuing more knowledge. That we want to be a better teacher, but we also are doing things I don't think they normally think their teachers do—traveling, enjoying beautiful lines in literature. So we aren't, again, hypocritical.

Matt Marone: I'm with you in the sense that people should be putting that on social media. But I think just like we see with selfies and just like we see with Pinterest, I think people are putting these fictionalized best selves on social media, which could be perpetuating a lot of this fear of failure. You know, are we really willing to put our wet worst lesson online? I don't know. And, you're talking about having to bail on a lesson because it's so poorly, we did it so poorly. Just last week. Do you ever have those moments where you're like, "I'm going to start the lesson and I'm going to figure it out as we go? And I think just because this group is so quick, they're going to . . ." Oh boy, I had some sort of game to test reading comprehension. I didn't know the rules of the game. So it turned into like, Whose Line Is It Anyway? when there's like no points because nothing really matters. I was just throwing points. . . It was just a disaster. And now, older teacher me might've just powered through and said, "No, they can't see me sweat."

Josh Flores: Yeah.



Matt Marone: But I couldn't do that. Now. I just said this isn't working. And that, and that's to me, humility.

Josh Flores: Good for you.

Matt Marone: We talked about humility. Well, good for me, they wouldn't have thought so because I mean it's . . . but it is, but it's just because it's so atypical from what our students get. They're so used to this kind of stoic . . . where we're bearing, you know, this lesson and we're going to, we don't want them to know that we're human and flawed, as crazy as that is. And I wonder if that extends to social media as well in that, I don't know if people are always, and I don't blame them, I don't think people are always sharing that vulnerability. And I think that there's so much risk in being judged. Right?

Josh Flores: So that'll be the call to action to this podcast. #MyWorstLesson: What was your worst lesson? And then just post that out on social media.

Matt Marone: I would love it. And I would love to be genuine, you know.

Josh Flores: And I have a couple.

Matt Marone: But I worry psychologically that maybe some people would put their best worst lesson.

Josh Flores: My best worst lesson.

Matt Marone: You know? The lesson that they learned from. Like I'd rather have the terrible lesson that was just a waste of everyone's time. You know?

Josh Flores: I got one of those stories. I'll tell you off-mic.

Matt Marone: Oh okay.

Josh Flores: Only because we're over 30 minutes and I know you've got stuff to do.

Matt Marone: Yeah, we talked nothing about design.

Josh Flores: We talked, we totally talked about design. That's great.

Matt Marone: As a metaphor.

Josh Flores: I mean design, you didn't give like a, "Here's what you do first. Here's what to do second." But I think we've got really general good sense about your design. And what I like about your design is that there is that improv jazz element to it. And I think, you know, I have a, when I get to copresent I have one PD partner who is



very structured, and I'm usually not the most structured one. And so I think we balance each other out in that. So like, when it comes down to improv, I can jump in there and do it. And, they need like notes.

Matt Marone: I will be eager to hear if *they* thought that you balance each other out.

Josh Flores: Yeah, they do. We've talked about extensively about presentation style. These are just things that interest us.

Matt Marone: And that's awesome. You need that. Hey, well I'm very glad Michelle Obama canceled and you were able to. . .

Josh Flores: We'll try and get her back on. But I'm glad you came in her stead. It was great.

Matt Marone: Absolutely. So thank you, Josh, and good luck with the rest of these.

Josh Flores: All right. Thanks a lot. Thanks for listening. Until next time, take care of yourself. Take care of students and take care of each other.